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ABSTRACT

Addressing current research on the foundational skills of reading for the state of Alaska, this booklet is designed to get the most current information available about how children learn to read into the hands of everyone who can help children learn and grow as readers. It outlines previously researched core abilities including phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles, sound-spelling correspondence, decoding ability, comprehension skills, and spelling, vocabulary, and writing skills. The booklet discusses essential components of research-based programs for beginning reading instruction and features of classrooms and schools that support effective beginning reading instruction. It then outlines reading performance standards and includes a chart indicating proficiency levels for Alaska Performance Standards for Reading. (SC)

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Unlocking the Door

Current Research on How Children Learn to Read

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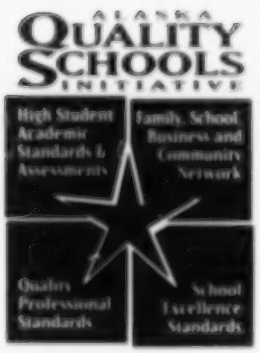

The Alaska Department of Education acknowledges the Illinois State Board of Education, the California State Department of Education and the Texas Education Agency for their work in compiling and publishing the material contained in this publication. The Alaska Department of Education has gratefully borrowed from their work.

A Message from the Commissioner of Education

Everyone able to read this message knows that reading is the key to success in school, work and life. It opens the door to learning about other places, other times, the world and ourselves. It allows us to develop the skills that enhance our lives at school, at work and at home. As a state, Alaska has adopted the goal that all children will be independent readers by the end of third grade. To reach this goal the State Board of Education has set state reading standards. In public school, we measure whether students are meeting those standards with the Alaska Benchmark Examination in reading at the third, sixth and eighth grades, and with the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination. Clearly, we've made reading a top priority.

A child's right to succeed in school and in life depends on being able to read. It is the key. It our responsibility to show children the key. Schools, families, and communities share this responsibility. It will take all of us working together to reach our goal. Our work needs to be based on the best, most current information available about how children learn to read. This booklet, ***Unlocking the Door: Current Research on How Children Learn to Read***, is designed to get that information into the hands of everyone who can help our children learn and grow as readers. Helping them become good readers is the best gift we can give to our children.

Their success is the best gift for the future of Alaska.

Sincerely,

Richard S. Cross
Commissioner of Education

Foreword

Unlocking the Door: Current Research on How Children Learn to Read addresses current research on the foundational skills of reading – those skills most effectively taught during beginning reading instruction in the early years of schooling. Intentional instruction within a comprehensive reading program during this critical period sets the stage for a lifetime of literacy.

Foundational skills, though certainly essential, are not a complete picture of effective reading instruction. Learning to apply these skills in a variety of ways begins in the early years of school and continues through high school and beyond. Students grow as readers by using their reading skills to respond to literature, learn with textbooks, read informational materials, find and use reference materials, access electronic information, interpret visual and graphic displays and evaluate information sources. The Alaska Content and Performance Standards require students to apply their reading skills in exactly these ways.

Other components of language learning support and reinforce the acquisition of reading skills. These supporting processes include speaking, listening and writing. ***Unlocking the Door: Current Research on How Children Learn to Read*** addresses these components as they support the acquisition of foundational skills.

Finally, we must pay constant attention to the contexts in which students read: at school, at home, in the workplace, in the community, and as individuals in the pursuit of information or simply for pleasure. These contexts supply the "where" and "why" of reading for students, giving them not only opportunities to read, but reasons to read. Ultimately, our goal is to enable each student to become a purposeful, motivated and capable reader who can use this invaluable set of skills for a lifetime of learning and enjoyment. We need the help of all Alaskans in meeting this goal. Working together, we can make a difference.

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GOAL

Every student is an independent reader by the end of the 3rd grade.

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Research on Reading Instruction – What We Know

Research over the past 30 years has shed tremendous light on how children learn to read. Certain abilities must be developed that work together to create strong reading skills. These core abilities include:

- **Phonemic awareness** - the ability to segment words and syllables into constituent sound units (phonemes). Some measures of phonemic awareness include rapid naming of letters, numbers and colors, and awareness of print as symbolic of sound. Problems with phonemic awareness are the best predictor in kindergarten or first grade of future reading difficulty in grade three.

  Instruction at an early age (kindergarten) using the following types of phonemic awareness tasks has had a positive effect on reading acquisition and spelling for pre-readers: rhyming, auditorily discriminating among sounds that are different, blending spoken sounds into words, isolating sounds from words, deleting sounds from words and word-to-word matching.

- **Alphabetic principle** - recognizing the letters of the alphabet and that written words are composed of patterns of letters that represent the sounds of spoken words. It is not simply the accuracy with which children can name letters that gives them an advantage when learning to read, it is also the ease with which they do so. Thus, the speed with which children can name individual letters strongly predicts success for prereaders and is strongly related to reading achievement among beginning readers. A child who can recognize letters with speed and confidence will have an easier time learning about letter sounds and word spellings. Also, many letter names are related to their sounds, again making the connection between sound and print easier.

- **Sound-spelling correspondence** - the ability to match letters and letter combinations with sounds, and to blend sounds together into seamless words. Direct sound-spelling instruction (phonic instruction) means telling children explicitly what single sound a letter or letter combination makes. This has been proven more effective in

preventing reading problems than asking children to figure out sound-spelling correspondences from giving clues or using whole words only. Phonemes must be separated from words for direct instruction. Later, as children learn two or three sound-letter correspondences, they should be taught how to blend the sounds into words, moving sequentially from left to right. Blending practice should use words composed of only the sound-letter combinations learned that day.

- **Decoding ability -** the ability to identify familiar words rapidly and effortlessly and to "figure out" words never seen before, relying primarily on print rather than pictures or story context. Children must learn effective sounding-out strategies that will allow them to decode words they have never before seen in print. Some effective instructional approaches to teach decoding strategies include sound-letter practice, word families, onsets and rimes, and blending. More advanced strategies focus on structural analysis, the identification of root words, and prefixes and suffixes.

- **Comprehension Skills -** the ability to extract meaning from text. Three major teaching strategies build these skills: reading a lot of material, through classroom and individual reading programs; practicing specific reading strategies such as summarizing, asking and answering questions, using context clues, and rereading; and participating in in-depth discussions about reading materials to extract main ideas, points of view and purposes of the texts.

- **Spelling, Vocabulary and Writing Skills -** the ability to place letter patterns, both regular and irregular, and words into long-term memory, which helps build the ability to retrieve correct spellings and recognize word families, synonyms, homonyms and antonyms. An organized approach to teaching spelling in which children learn to use a variety of strategies to spell large numbers of words correctly is one of the most productive strategies in helping children learn to read. Spelling work should correlate with vocabulary work in a systematic way, with regular introduction and learning of sufficient words to correspond to the increasing vocabulary in reading materials. Regular writing opportunities, including the use of temporary spellings in drafts, and time to proofread and correct, should reinforce spelling and vocabulary skills.

Essential Components of Research-Based Programs for Beginning Reading Instruction

Children have opportunities to expand their use and appreciation of oral language.

Language experiences are central to good reading instruction. Children learn a great deal about the world, themselves and others from spoken language. The structure of the English language becomes familiar through speaking and listening. Kindergarten and first grade language instruction that focuses on listening, speaking and understanding includes the following:

- Songs, chants and poems that are fun to sing and say;
- Discussions about a variety of topics familiar to students;
- Concept development and vocabulary lessons;
- Games and other activities that involve talking, listening and following directions.

Children have opportunities to expand their use and appreciation of printed language.

Children's appreciation and understanding of the purposes and functions of written language are essential to their motivation for learning to read. Children must recognize that printed language appears all around them – in books, magazines, newspapers, and on signs, billboard and labels. Reading instruction that focuses on the uses for and appreciation of printed language includes the following:

- Activities that highlight the meaning, use and production of print in classroom signs, labels, nametags, posters, calendars and lists;
- Activities that teach print conventions such as directionality (left to right, for example);
- Activities related to handling books and magazines, such as finding the front cover, turning the pages and holding them right side up;
- Activities that focus on the sizes and shapes of words, such as their boundaries, appearance and length;
- Practice with patterned language stories.

Children have opportunities to hear good stories and informational books read aloud daily.

Listening to books read aloud and talking about them introduces children to the pleasures and benefits of reading. Reading aloud introduces children to new words, sentences and ideas. They hear the types of vocabulary, sentences and text structures they will be expected to read and understand. They hear written words translated into fluent speech. Activities include the following:

- Reading aloud every day;
- Reading a variety of both stories and informational books and articles;
- Talking about books and stories and relating them to familiar things.

Children have opportunities to understand and manipulate the building blocks of spoken language.

Children's ability to think about individual words as a sequence of sounds is important to their learning how to read an alphabetic language. Instruction that promotes children's understanding and use of the building blocks of spoken language includes the following:

- Language games that teach children how to identify words that rhyme and to create rhymes on their own;
- Activities that demonstrate that sentences are (1) made up of separate words, (2) made of syllables and (3) can be broken down into separate sounds;
- Activities where children manipulate the sounds of words, separate words into sounds, blend sounds, delete sounds or substitute new sounds for those deleted.

Children have opportunities to learn about and manipulate the building blocks of written language.

Knowledge of letters is essential to successful reading. This includes the use, purpose and functions of letters. Instruction that promotes children's understanding and use of the building blocks of written language includes the following:

- Learning the names of letters and practicing their rapid and accurate recognition.
- Learning to print the letters they are learning to identify.
- Writing and manipulating letters to make simple messages.

Children have opportunities to learn the relationship between the sounds of spoken language and the letters of written language.

Increasing children's awareness of the sounds of spoken language and their familiarity with written letters prepares them to understand the alphabetic principle – that written words are composed of patterns of letters that represent the sounds of spoken words. Explicit and systematic teaching of sound-letter relationships should occur in a sequence that permits the children to assimilate and apply what they are learning. Helpful instruction includes the following:

- Alphabetic awareness activities in which children learn that printed words are made up of patterns of letters.
- Lessons in sound-letter relationships that are organized systematically and that provide plenty of practice and review as needed.
- Activities in which children combine and manipulate letters to change words and spelling patterns.

Children have opportunities to learn decoding strategies.

Readers need to quickly and automatically translate the letters and spelling patterns of written words into speech sounds so that they can identify words and grasp their meaning. Children must learn to identify words quickly and effortlessly, so that they can focus on the meaning of what they read. Explicit decoding strategies must be acquired so that in effect, all words eventually become "sight words." Effective instruction includes the following:

- Practice in decoding and identifying words that contain the sound-letter relationships children are learning to read and *need* for reading and writing.
- Activities that involve word families and rhyming patterns.
- Activities that involve blending together the components of sounded-out words.

- Activities in which children change beginning, middle or ending letters of related words, thus changing the words they decode and spell.
- Introduction of phonetically "irregular" words in practice activities and stories.

Children have opportunities to read and comprehend a wide assortment of books and other texts.

As children learn effective decoding strategies and practice these skills, they begin to read books and other texts that are less predictable and patterned. Soon, they become enthusiastic and independent readers of all kinds of materials – books, magazines, newspapers, computer screens, media presentations and much more. Providing children with a great many reading materials, both narrative *and* informational, is of primary importance. Classrooms and libraries must offer children a variety of reading materials, some that are easy to read and others that are more challenging and of increasing difficulty and complexity. Children need access to many books that travel home for reading with family members and friends. Classrooms that ensure broad access to reading materials provide the following:

- Daily time for self-selected reading.
- Access to books and other reading materials that are attractive to children.
- Access to books that can be taken home to be read independently or with family members and friends.

Children have opportunities to learn and apply comprehension strategies as they reflect upon and think critically about what they have read.

Written language is not just speech written down. Instead, written language offers new vocabulary, new language patterns, new concepts and new ways of thinking and communicating. Comprehension depends on the ability to quickly and automatically identify familiar words, which includes fluent reading, as well as the ability to figure out new words. But this is not enough.

Comprehension also depends on understanding word meanings, on the development of meaningful ideas from groups of words (phrases, clauses, sentences and passages) and the drawing of inferences. It also depends on

the demands of the text (density, vocabulary, complexity of concepts) and the knowledge the reader possesses. For children to receive the greatest benefit and enjoyment from reading, they must receive comprehension strategy instruction that builds on their knowledge of language and of the world. Comprehension strategy instruction can include the following:

- Activities that help children preview reading selections, anticipate content and make connections between what they will read and what they already know;
- Instruction that provides options when understanding is difficult, for example, rereading, using context clues, asking for expert help, or looking up words in a dictionary;
- Guidance for helping children compare characters, plots and themes in different stories;
- Activities that encourage discussion about what is being read, such as drawing conclusions and making predictions.

Children have opportunities to write and relate their writing to spelling and reading.

As children learn to read and write words, they become aware of how these words are spelled. Increasing children's awareness of spelling patterns hastens their progress in both reading and writing. In the early grades, spelling instruction must be coordinated with the program of reading instruction. As children progress, systematic lessons in spelling strategies are beneficial. Activities for effective spelling instruction include the following:

- Proofreading activities;
- Emphasis on pride in correct spelling;
- Lessons that help children address spelling conventions in a systematic way;
- Activities that surround children in words and give purpose to reading and writing.

Children have opportunities to practice accurate and fluent reading in decodable stories.

When children are learning to read, the most useful practice in promoting automatic word recognition and fluent, effortless reading is the reading

and rereading of meaningful stories that are decodable and manageable. The words in these stories are based on the sound-letter relationships the children are learning. Such stories provide children with the opportunity to immediately practice what they are learning about letters and sounds. As children learn to read words, sentences and stories fluently, accurately and automatically, they no longer have to struggle to identify words and are free to pay closer attention to the meaning.

It must be noted that predictable, patterned language stories are often not based on the sound-letter relationships children are learning and should not be confused with decodable text. Research strongly asserts that children benefit greatly from direct, systematic decoding instruction and that instruction should follow with practice in decodable stories. Stories should "fit" the child's reading level. Beginning readers should be able to read easily 90 percent or more of the words in a story, and after practice should be able to do so quickly, accurately and effortlessly.

Children have opportunities to develop new vocabulary through wide reading and direct vocabulary instruction.

Written language places greater demands on children's vocabulary knowledge than does their everyday spoken language. It is obvious that the number of new words children learn from reading depends upon how much they read. Therefore, it is important that teachers read aloud to children and encourage them to do a great deal of voluntary and independent reading. In addition, during reading instruction, children should be asked to attend to the meaning of new words. Vocabulary building activities include the following:

- Reading of a variety of books, stories, articles and passages, both narrative and informational;
- Instruction that provides explicit information both about the meanings of words and how they are used in stories that are read;
- Activities that involve analyzing context to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words in a reading passage;
- Discussions of new words encountered during the course of the day;
- Activities that encourage children both to use words they are learning in their own writing and to keep records of interesting and related words.

Features of Classrooms and Schools that Support Effective Beginning Reading Instruction

Reading improvement requires a total school effort and cannot be accomplished without the support of school boards and school administrators. The following is a list of those classroom and school/district features that support a successful reading program.

Careful Use of Instructional Time

While language arts practice occurs across subjects throughout the school day, significant time must be dedicated to reading instruction and specific language arts instruction. Elementary schools dedicate and protect a substantial amount of time each morning for reading and language arts instruction (e.g., 90 minutes or more). Some children need additional assistance and are provided instruction that is based on their specific individual needs.

Systematic reading instruction begins in kindergarten and continues throughout the elementary grades. This careful, consistent and comprehensive instruction is based on research and thoughtful evaluation of data obtained from the Developmental Profiles, classroom observations, reading inventories, formal and informal assessments including the Benchmark examinations and samples of student work.

Language and concept development activities are deliberately included across the curriculum, along with daily reading aloud and discussions of high-quality reading materials, both narrative and informational.

Effective Instructional Practices

Teachers organize purposeful and flexible groups based on children's instructional needs. Membership in these groups changes as the children progress or as they experience difficulty.

Teachers provide instruction that involves frequent interactions with children and constructive feedback.

Children read at an appropriate level in their programs of instruction, and teachers adjust their instructional practices according to how well and how quickly the children progress.

Children who have difficulty learning to read are provided with additional reading instruction in small group and/or tutoring settings. In addition, before-school or after-school sessions, special reading improvement classes and summer school classes are provided for all children who need extra help. Such instruction is coordinated with the children's regular school day programs and is based on continual and thoughtful analysis of each child's progress and needs.

Sound Instructional Materials

Research-based criteria are used to select the instructional materials that provide the content and structure for the classroom reading program. These criteria establish the need for systematic instruction and sufficient practice in a number of aspects of beginning reading. These aspects include the following:

- **Phonemic awareness** - Children learn how to divide spoken words into individual sounds and to blend spoken sounds into words;
- **Alphabetic principle** - Children learn to recognize, name and write letters; they learn that sounds can be represented by letters, and learn to recognize the most useful sound-letter relationships;
- **Decoding ability** - Children learn blending and other decoding strategies that permit them to sound out new words and to identify them quickly;
- **Decodable text** - Children read words, sentences and stories that contain the sound- letter relationships they are learning, as well as some "sight" words, building the ability to recognize words rapidly and automatically. Because fluent reading is essential to comprehension, children practice both oral and silent reading. Children have access to an array of manageable stories, books and other materials, both narrative and informational, to read on their own and with others.

- **Comprehension and understanding** - Children discuss the meaning of everything they are learning to read - words, sentences, stories, directions, signs - with each other and with their teachers, tutors and Reading Advocates. They build comprehension strategies such as rereading, using context clues and prior knowledge, and asking questions as they read more complex materials.
- **Spelling and writing** - Children write using their knowledge of printed letters and the sounds they represent. They are encouraged to use temporary spellings for words they haven't yet learned to spell. Because knowledge of sound-letter patterns contributes to reading success, spelling instruction is coordinated with the program of reading instruction. Knowledge of and practice in using proofreading skills, spelling strategies, and correct spellings also contributes to better writing.
- **Vocabulary acquisition** - The meanings of unfamiliar words are taught and discussed. Children also acquire word meanings through wide reading.
- **Language activities** - Children engage in storytime discussions, journal keeping, wide reading and purposeful writing.

Reading Opportunities

As children develop as readers, they eagerly read materials they can understand, learn from and enjoy. Children must have access to classroom and school libraries that have large and varied collections of books, magazines, software and other reading materials. Children thus have the opportunity to read widely, engage in meaningful small group and classroom discussions about what they are reading and learn to support their interpretations by relying on the text.

A Variety of Assessment Tools

Teachers and administrators regard assessments as informative and integral to the teaching and learning process. They select and administer reading assessments according to the needs of individual students. They conduct ongoing evaluations of student progress to help them plan instruction. Parents, teachers and administrators are kept informed of children's reading progress based on assessment information and thoughtful evaluation.

The following assessments and evaluations should be used with all children:

- **Screening assessments** - During kindergarten and first grade, children are screened for phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge and understanding of basic language concepts;
- **Informal assessments** - On a regular basis, children are informally assessed to determine if they are making adequate reading progress. These assessments can include measures of reading rate and accuracy and story retellings. These assessments are used as a basis for adjusting instruction to the needs of each child;
- **End-of-year assessments** - Children are assessed at the end of the school year to inform parents, teachers and school and district administrators about student reading progress. These assessments are used to meet the specific needs of children and to adjust the reading program for the following year.

The following assessments are required by state law:

- Developmental Profiles for children entering school at Kindergarten or 1st grade;
- Alaska Benchmark Examinations at grades 3, 6 and 8;
- California Achievement Test (CAT-5) at grades 4 and 7;
- The Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination.

A Positive School Climate

Administrators and staff create schools that welcome their students and create a positive school environment that contributes to their successful progress as readers. Aspects of a positive school climate include the following:

- **Attractive environment** - Buildings and classrooms are clean, neat and inviting;
- **Book-rich environment** - Lots of books and other reading materials are in evidence and in use in classrooms and school libraries;
- **Student work** - Children's written work is displayed in the classrooms and hallways;

- **Positive staff** - The staff is friendly and respectful of students and is committed to a program of continuous student development from one grade level to the next. The staff models good reading behaviors on a daily basis;
- **Curricular decisions** - Continuous improvement is the norm; materials are carefully selected, the sequence of instruction is flexible yet systematic, and new ideas are evaluated and integrated with regularity;
- **Student attitudes** - Students are proud of their accomplishments and respectful of teachers and of other students.

Systematic Professional Development

Teachers take part in frequent, relevant and systematic professional development that focuses on improving their skills as teachers of reading and meeting the needs of all children. Professional development includes strategies for assisting all students to meet state standards.

Teachers have time to work with and consult with each other, to visit each other's classrooms and to make instructional decisions that improve transitions of students from one grade level to the next.

Quality Schools Consultants, working through school district offices and the Alaska Department of Education, are available to assist schools and districts in meeting their professional development goals.

Sound Administrative Practices

Administrators work to allocate all possible resources of the school, including staff time, to meet the goal of successful reading instruction for all students. They demonstrate and designate instructional leadership that includes monitoring students' progress in each classroom and providing help when students are not making sufficient progress. They provide leadership in ensuring consistency and continuity across grade levels.

Administrators participate in and support professional development for teachers to improve reading instruction. They help teachers focus on the performance and needs of their students. In their words and in their actions, they consistently support the components of effective reading instruction.

Reading Performance Standards

Relationship to Alaska Content Standards for English/Language Arts

The CONTENT STANDARDS FOR ALASKA STUDENTS were adopted by the Alaska State Board of Education in 1994 and 1995. The PERFORMANCE STANDARDS were approved in January, 1999. They support the sections of the English/Language Arts Content Standards noted below. The Benchmark Assessments and High School Qualifying Examination will assess student competencies on these performance standards.

B. A student should be a competent and thoughtful reader, listener, and viewer of literature, technical materials, and a variety of other information. A student who meets the content standard should:

1. Comprehend meaning from written text and oral and visual information by applying a variety of reading, listening, and viewing strategies; these strategies include phonic, context, and vocabulary cues in reading, critical viewing, and active listening;
2. Reflect on, analyze, and evaluate a variety of oral, written, and visual information and experiences, including discussions, lectures, art, movies, television, technical materials, and literature, and;
3. Relate what the student views, reads, and hears to practical purposes in the student's own life, to the world outside, and to other texts and experiences.

D. A student should be able to think logically and reflectively in order to present and explain positions based on relevant and reliable information. A student who meets the content standard should:

1. Develop a position by
   a. Reflecting on personal experience, prior knowledge, and new information;
   b. Formulating and refining questions;
   c. Identifying a variety of pertinent sources of information;
   d. Analyzing and synthesizing information;
   e. Determining an author's purposes.
2. Evaluate the validity, objectivity, reliability, and quality of information read, heard, and seen.

E. A student should understand and respect the perspectives of others in order to communicate effectively. A student who meets the content standard should:

1. Use information, both oral and written, and literature of many types and cultures to understand self and others;
2. Recognize content from the speaker's or author's perspective;
3. Recognize bias in all forms of communication;
4. Recognize the communication styles of different cultures and the possible effects on others.

Alaska Performance Standards for Reading

Proficient Level Descriptors *Approved January 20, 1999 by the Alaska State Board of Education*

Between ages 5-7, students: *(To be assessed in 3rd Grade.)*	**Between ages 8-10, students know and are able to do everything required at earlier ages and:** *(To be assessed in 6th Grade.)*
Distinguish, reproduce, and manipulate the sounds in words. Use a combination of the following to read and comprehend text: • knowledge of phonics, alphabet, and alphabetic principle, e.g. recognition of letter shapes, letter names, letter/sound relationships, initial/final consonants, vowels, letter patterns; • pictures and visual cues; • sight recognition of high frequency vocabulary words; • word structure, e.g., root words, prefixes, suffixes, rhyming words; • language structure, e.g., word order, grammar; • meaning structure, e.g., prior knowledge and context; • text structure e.g., read left to right.	Use a combination of the following to read and comprehend text: • knowledge of phonetics, language structure, and semantics; • text structures such as illustrations, graphs, and headers; • self-monitoring and self-correcting strategies; • adjusting reading pace or style based on purpose, task, and type of text. Use knowledge of word families, phonetics, context clues, visual cues, and structural elements to determine meaning of unfamiliar words.
Comprehend literal meaning from text. Use a variety of strategies to support comprehension, including predicting, questioning, rereading, and monitoring own comprehension.	Infer meaning from text.
Read texts aloud with expression, demonstrating knowledge of punctuation and other conventions of print.	Read texts aloud with rhythm, flow, and expression, demonstrating knowledge of punctuation and other conventions of print.
Retell or dramatize a story after reading it. Restate information after reading a text.	Retell stories in correct sequence. Restate and summarize information or ideas from a text.

Between ages 11-14, students know and are able to do everything required at earlier ages and: *(To be assessed in 8th Grade.)*	**Between ages 15-18, students know and are able to do everything required at earlier ages and:** *(High School Qualifying Examination)*
Apply knowledge of word origins, structure and context clues, and root words, and use dictionaries and glossaries, to determine the meaning of new words and to comprehend text.	Apply knowledge of syntax, roots, and word origins, and use context clues and reference materials, to determine the meaning of new words and to comprehend text.
Rehearse and read texts aloud to an audience, in performances such as readers' theater, reading to younger students or peers, or as part of formal presentations including research reports and literature responses.	
Restate and summarize information or ideas from a text and connect new information or ideas to prior knowledge and experience.	Summarize information or ideas from a text and make connections between summarized information or sets of ideas and related topics or information.

Alaska Performance Standards for Reading

Proficient Level Descriptors *(Continued)*

Between ages 5-7, students: *(To be assessed in 3rd Grade.)*	Between ages 8-10, students know and are able to do everything required at earlier ages and: *(To be assessed in 6th Grade.)*
Identify the main idea of a passage	Locate evidence in the text and from related experiences to support understanding of a main idea
Read and follow simple directions to complete a simple task	Read and follow multi-step directions to complete a simple task
Distinguish between common forms of text (genres) • fiction and non-fiction, • prose and poetry, and • short story and drama	Explain the characteristics of the following • fiction and non-fiction, • prose and poetry, and • four major genres of fiction - short story, drama, novel, and poetry
Identify and describe basic plot, main characters, and setting (time and place) in fiction	Define and identify plots, settings, and characters in fiction Compare and contrast plots, settings and characters in a variety of works by a variety of authors
Express own opinions about texts	Differentiate between fact and opinion Express opinions about a text and support these opinions with textual evidence
Make connections between a text and personal experiences, experiences of others, or other texts and locate details in the text to illustrate these connections	Identify themes in texts and connect them to personal experiences, experiences of others, and other texts
Identify basic cultural influences in texts	Connect cultural events, ideas, settings, and influences from one text to similar texts from other cultures

Between ages 11-14, students know and are able to do everything required at earlier ages and: ***(To be assessed in 8th Grade.)***	**Between ages 15-18, students know and are able to do everything required at earlier ages and:** ***(High School Qualifying Examination)***
Clarify and connect main ideas and concepts, identify their relationship to other sources and related topics, and provide supporting details	Identify and assess the validity, accuracy, and adequacy of evidence that supports an author's main ideas Critique the power, logic, reasonableness, and audience appeal of arguments advanced in public documents
Read and follow multi-step directions to complete a task, and identify the sequence prescribed	Read and follow multi-step directions to complete complex tasks
Analyze basic rules (conventions) of the four genres of fiction (short story, drama, novel and poetry)	Analyze the rules (conventions) of the four genres of fiction (short story, drama, novel and poetry) and the techniques used in these genres, and evaluate the effects of these conventions and techniques on the audience
Analyze and evaluate narrative elements including plot, character, setting and point of view to determine their importance to the story	Analyze, and evaluate how authors use narrative elements and tone in fiction for specific purposes
Differentiate between fact and opinion in text Analyze an author's purpose and offer a critical opinion of the effectiveness of the text in meeting that purpose	Express and support assertions with evidence from the text or experience, about the effectiveness of a text
Connect themes to personal experiences, experiences of others, and other texts, and locate evidence from texts to support or illustrate these connections	Analyze and evaluate themes across a variety of texts, using textual and experiential evidence
Compare and contrast how texts reflect historical and cultural influences	Analyze the effects of cultural and historical influences on texts

References

The following is a starter list of references. It represents summary-style articles and materials geared for broad audiences.

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9. The School Administrator, Number 8 Vol. 54 (September 1997). Five articles on "reading the right way" and the phonics vs. whole language debates.

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Alaska Department of Education
801 West 10th Street, Suite 200
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894
(907) 465-2800